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ABSTRACT

This report describes the procedures followed and the recommendations made by a committee formed to study the possibility of initiating some type of merit pay plan in the Wichita, Kansas public school system. Although the committee made efforts to select school systems of 50,000-77,000 enrollments that had installed merit pay plans, they failed to find any such districts. The committee came to the conclusion that merit pay systems as they are currently conceived fail to improve teacher effectiveness. The study group decided that, until adequate techniques and relevant criteria for evaluating professional personnel are developed, there is little likelihood that any progress can be made toward increased accountability through the implementation of a merit pay plan. A related document is EA 004 748. (JF)

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WICHITA PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Unified School District 259
Dr. Alvin E. Morris, Superintendent

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1971-72 REPORT OF MERIT PAY COMMITTEE

March 10, 1972

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EA 004 747

WICHITA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Merit Pay Committee

REPORT ON MERIT PAY

Background. By a resolution adopted by the Wichita Board of Education on August 23, 1971, the Superintendent was directed, in part, to appoint a committee of 15, composed of professional educators and lay people, to study and recommend to the Board a means of compensating teachers and administrators for excellence of performance based in part on the educational achievements of their students.

Two initial problems slowed the progress of the committee. There was difficulty in finding lay people who were willing to serve and, secondly, NEA-Wichita objected to the Board's resolution which was interpreted to mean "a plan" must be implemented during the 1972-73 school year.

The Board rescinded its initial action on November 1, 1971, and adopted the following motion:

> "Move that the Board of Education, with the recommendation of the Superintendent, approve a committee of fifteen (15) professional educators and lay people for the purpose of studying merit pay systems as a means for compensating teachers and administrators, and reporting the results of such study by March 15 to the Board of Education and the NEA-Wichita Executive Committee."

Early Questions Raised by the Committee. The first question discussed by the Merit Pay Committee was "Are certain methods of rewarding teachers, many of which are used in Wichita, really a type of merit pay—specifically the concept of extra pay for extra work?" These extra work assignments include: summer school assignments, appointment as department heads, paid workshops, etc. Survey findings reveal that these extra work assignments are the most frequently reported type of "merit pay." The committee sought, first, to direct its attention towards types of merit pay frequently described by lay people and educators — those which reward meritorious service by acceleration on the salary schedule or permitting the maximum step to be exceeded.

Second, the Merit Pay committee members asked, What was the purpose of the Board's motion? Was the basic purpose the development of a plan which would improve the educational product, or one which would reward the effective teacher more than the less effective teacher? Committee members questioned whether the latter would result in a better educational product.

Other early questions centered on the reliability and validity of tools which are designed to measure teacher effectiveness. It was further questioned whether teaching objectives have been refined to the point where they can be used to accurately assess teaching effectiveness. The Research personnel indicated that measurement techniques have not yet been refined to a point where teaching effectiveness can be isolated from other influences, such as those caused by neighborhood, family, and school facilities.

Examination of merit pay plans and related information. Many merit pay plans were examined by the committee. NEA and AFT Research bulletins (1970-71) revealed two school systems the size of Wichita reported merit pay plans in use.

Fewer than 2% of the school systems with 50,000 to 99,000 enrollment reported provisions for "teachers to exceed the regular salary schedule for meritorious service." It was revealed that the smaller the school system, the greater percentage reporting merit pay provisions. The greatest percentage reporting merit pay provisions (9.4%) were schools with 6,000 to 11,000 enrollment.

Research Plan. The committee agreed, because of time limitations, to search for successful existing merit pay plans which the Wichita committee might examine. The approach was to:

1. Select 10 school systems with pupil populations ranging from 50,000 to 77,000 and contact representatives by phone to determine if they had unreported plans, were developing plans, or had abandoned merit pay plans.

2. Select school systems from those reporting a merit pay plan and contact them for the details of their plans, guidelines, or other relevant information.
3. Call additional school systems by phone on the basis of "leads" obtained by contacts made to school systems in items 1 and 2.

Survey Findings. The search for an established plan currently in use proved fruitless. San Diego was the only city called which at present is developing a merit pay plan. The San Diego Board of Education, on August 1, 1971, had requested that committees be established to develop a merit pay plan. As of now, San Diego does not have a plan, but they have completed guidelines for developing one.

In gathering information related to merit pay plans (see attachment "A"), great differences were evident between written NEA and AFT survey results as reported by school districts and the committee's telephoned interviews. These differences led the committee to question whether reports are correct in saying merit pay plans are being developed in an increasing number of school systems. A statement to this effect was recently made in a presentation during a Kansas Association of School Boards sponsored meeting in Wichita.

Questions Raised and General Observations. The committee is acutely aware that many educators, administrators and teachers, and lay people are frustrated with ineffective teaching and administration to which they find some pupils exposed. However, the committee is doubtful that extra money distributed by the "traditional" merit plans, that is, awarding additional money to those teachers judged to be more effective, will cause an improvement in the overall instructional quality of the school system. Although an adequate salary schedule will attract a higher quality of entering teacher from the competitive marketplace, the committee believes that neither more rapid advancement on the salary schedule or beyond it will cause the teacher or administrator to become more effective — nor, conversely, that less rapid advancement or holding to a position on the salary schedule will cause the teacher or administrator to become

more effective. If the two are not related, that is, rewards do not cause better performance, the Board might want to reexamine its interest in merit pay. Does the Board want to reward the more effective teacher and administrator, and/or to improve the educational product?

The committee believes that more effective teaching and administration must be implemented by techniques and policies other than those examined by this committee. For example, since it is extremely difficult under present tenure law to terminate tenured teachers and administrators, the committee questioned if plans might be developed whereby people who are not effective as teachers could be placed in other positions where their contribution to the total educational effort would be increased. (This reassignment process is now used at the administrative level.)

The committee questions whether existing policies result in sufficient frequency and duration of classroom and job visitation necessary for the early identification of weaknesses in job performance.

The committee questions if policies related directly to the evaluation of professional personnel provide for the involvement of representatives from enough interested groups to maximize the validity of evaluation -- namely, parents, teachers, and administrators, as well as consideration for some type of pupil input.

The committee questions, after initial identification of suspected unsatisfactory job performance, whether the necessary concentration of remedial help is available, and if policies should be developed so that line and staff responsibilities in remedial efforts are more efficiently coordinated.

Finally, the committee questions whether or not effective teachers might more nearly maximize their unique potentials if provision were made for assistance, such as clerical aides, teaching aides, and other supportive personnel.

Limits of Study. The committee has attempted to limit its comments to those areas of concern most closely associated with classroom and administration effectiveness -- the efficiency of the teacher and administrator. The committee is fully aware that

teaching materials, class size, and classroom facilities relate to the total instructional effectiveness. However, the teachers and administrators are the major forces behind the educational program.

Summary and Recommendations. The committee has found no existing merit pay plan that it recommends to the Board of Education for further study. In the committee's opinion, there are still too many unresolved practical and philosophical problems involved for a plan to be implemented successfully at this time. The committee believes that one of the major problems is that of being able to devise both adequate techniques and objectives and relevant criteria for evaluation of professional personnel. Until these problems are solved, there is little likelihood that any progress can be made in the area of increased accountability.

The committee, therefore, recommends that the Board of Education continue its efforts to improve ways of effectively evaluating professional personnel at all levels and relating these tools to policies which will help improve the general quality of teaching and administration.

Additional efforts might well include studying:

1. The goals of evaluation
2. The instruments used in the evaluative procedure
3. The frequency and character of the evaluative situation
4. The composition and responsibilities of the evaluative group

The committee believes it is time to seek new approaches to the whole subject of personnel evaluation and personnel management. It would prove profitable, the committee believes, to explore such possibilities as mutual evaluation between teachers and administrators and evaluation by peers and parents as well as supervisors with provisions for input by pupils.

Finally, the committee recommends that parents, NEA-Wichita, and AFT be involved as integral parts, along with the administration, of all such further studies. Without the support of parents and the professional organizations, any evaluative procedure developed has little chance of acceptance on a broad base.